

AO 91 (Rev. 11/11) Criminal Complaint

LODGED
CLERK, U.S. DISTRICT COURT
03/18/2025
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
BY: _____ MC _____ DEPUTY

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

Central District of California



FILED
CLERK, U.S. DISTRICT COURT
03/18/25
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
BY: _____ KC _____ DEPUTY

United States of America

v.

John Reich Ratliff

Case No.

5:25-mj-00137-DUTY

Defendant(s)
CRIMINAL COMPLAINT BY TELEPHONE OR OTHER RELIABLE ELECTRONIC MEANS

I, the complainant in this case, state that the following is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

On or about the date(s) of November 4, 2020 in the county of San Bernardino in the
Central District of California, the defendant(s) violated:

Code Section

18 U.S.C. Section 1542

Offense Description

False Statement in Application for a Passport.

This criminal complaint is based on these facts:
 See attached affidavit.

☒ Continued on the attached sheet.

/s/

Complainant's signature

David Collier, Special Agent

Printed name and title

Attested to by the applicant in accordance with the requirements of Fed. R. Crim. P. 4.1 by telephone.

Date: March 18, 2025
*Judge's signature*City and state: Riverside, California

Honorable Sheri Pym, Magistrate Judge

Printed name and title

AFFIDAVIT

I, David Collier, being duly sworn, declare and state as follows:

I. PURPOSE OF AFFIDAVIT

1. This affidavit is made in support of a criminal complaint and arrest warrant against John Reich Ratliff ("RATLIFF"), who submitted a passport application in the name of "Michael John Johannes" on November 4, 2020, for a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1542 (False Statement in Application for a Passport).

2. The facts set forth in this affidavit are based upon my personal observations, my training and experience, and information obtained from various law enforcement personnel and witnesses. This affidavit is intended to show merely that there is sufficient probable cause for the requested complaint and arrest warrant and does not purport to set forth all of my knowledge of or investigation into this matter. Unless specifically indicated otherwise, all conversations and statements described in this affidavit are related in substance and part only.

II. BACKGROUND OF AFFIANT

3. I am a Special Agent with the Department of State Diplomatic Security Service ("DSS"), currently assigned to the Los Angeles Field Office. DSS Special Agents are empowered under Title 22, United States Code, Section 2709 to investigate passport and visa fraud.

4. I have been employed by DSS for two years. Prior to being employed with DSS, I was a Special Agent with the Department of the Army Criminal Investigation Division. I am a graduate of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center's Criminal Investigator Program, the Department of State's Basic Special Agent Course, and the Department of the Army's Basic Special Agent Course. I receive ongoing training in the laws, rules, and regulations concerning passports.

III. SUMMARY OF PROBABLE CAUSE

5. On November 4, 2020, RATLIFF, purporting to be "Michael John Johannes," submitted Form DS-11, an Application for a U.S. Passport, at the Post Office in Crestline, California. As proof of identity and citizenship as "Michael John Johannes," RATLIFF presented a U.S. Virgin Islands birth certificate and a U.S. Virgin Islands driver's license. From communications with officials in the U.S. Virgin Islands, I learned that both the birth certificate and driver's license were fraudulent.

6. RATLIFF applied for the passport at the same time Kenneth Ratliff applied for a passport. Kenneth Ratliff and RATLIFF listed the same mother on their applications, Yvonne Reich Ratliff. Kenneth Ratliff presented a Utah driver's license as part of the application. While investigating the true identity of "Michael John Johannes," I discovered a booking photograph of RATLIFF from a 2016 arrest in Cache County, Utah. The booking photograph of RATLIFF appears to be the same person

in the passport photograph for the application in the name of "Michael John Johannes."

IV. STATEMENT OF PROBABLE CAUSE

7. Based on my review of law enforcement reports, conversations with other law enforcement agents, and my own knowledge of the investigation, I am aware of the following:

A. RATLIFF Applied for Passport and Fraud Prevention Manager Referred the Application to DSS

8. On November 4, 2020, an individual purporting to be "Michael John Johannes" submitted Form DS-11, an Application for a U.S. Passport with control number 781132563, at the U.S. Post Office in Crestline, California, within San Bernardino County. As proof of identity and citizenship, the applicant submitted a U.S. Virgin Islands Birth Certificate in the name of "Michael John Johannes" with a number ending in 1670 and a U.S. Virgin Islands driver's license in the name of "Michael John Johannes" with a number ending in 896. The El Paso Passport Office Fraud Prevention Manager suspected the driver's license and the birth certificate the applicant provided with his application were fraudulent and referred the case to DSS for further investigation.

9. The El Paso Passport Office Fraud Prevention Manager used facial recognition software to review the passport picture RATLIFF provided as part of his passport application. Facial recognition returned a "positive result" for a picture of "Eugene Schoeman" from a Non-Immigrant Visa in 2005. The passport picture of RATLIFF and the 2005 picture of the Non-

Immigrant Visa does appear to have similarities, including the ears and nose, but the 2005 picture depicts a much younger, thinner man so it is hard to tell whether it is the same person just based comparing the images. Initially, I investigated whether RATLIFF's true name was "Eugene Schoeman," based on the facial recognition result, but during the course of the investigation, I concluded the individual purporting to be "Michael John Johannes" was convicted as RATLIFF in Utah as outlined further below.

B. Identification Was Fraudulent and Facial Recognition Matches Picture of Non-Immigrant Visa Recipient

10. The birth certificate and the driver's license list the island of St. John, one of the U.S. Virgin Islands, as the location of birth and residence. The birth certificate submitted with the application listed the "Department of Social and Health Services" and a hospital of "Our Lady of Lourdes." According to the Jose Balado, Department of State, San Juan Passport Agency Fraud Prevention Manager (who covers the U.S. Virgin Islands), the "Department of Social and Health Services" does not exist on the U.S. Virgin Islands and "Our Lady of Lourdes" hospital never existed on St. John. The driver's license RATLIFF submitted had a street number listed on the address, however, according to Jose Balado, the U.S. Virgin Islands does not include street numbers on addresses, only the street name.

11. On December 16, 2020, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands verified there was no record

of birth for "Michael Johannes" on the island. The verification document further stated the address listed on the driver's license was not a valid address on the island of St. John. The document also stated the name of the medical clinic on St. John was Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Center, not "Our Lady of Lourdes" hospital.

12. As part of the application, RATLIFF provided a photo to be used in the passport along with the completed DS-11.

13. RATLIFF applied for the passport at the same time as Kenneth Ratliff applied for a passport. Kenneth Ratliff and RATLIFF listed the same mother on their DS-11, Yvonne Reich Ratliff. Kenneth Ratliff presented a Utah driver's license as part of the application.

14. While investigating the identity of the applicant who submitted a passport application in the name of "Michael John Johannes," I found a news article with information on an arrest record of RATLIFF. I requested a copy of the arrest record and booking photograph from the Cache County Sheriff's Office. I received a copy of the booking photograph from Janet Baker, Cache County Sheriff's Office Records. The photograph of RATLIFF appeared to be the same individual depicted in the passport photograph submitted with the passport application for "Michael John Johannes":

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Photograph from 2020 DS-11



2016 Booking Photograph

15. Reviewing the images, the similarities are most apparent to me in the curve of the nose, shape of the nose, the chin, the complexion, and style of the hair.

16. The news article, and subsequent verification through the files of the Utah Identification Bureau, revealed RATLIFF was arrested in 2016. RATLIFF was convicted of felony possession of a forgery device, and misdemeanor failure to disclose his identity and interfering with an arresting officer.

17. I received a copy of the police report related to the 2016 arrest from the Logan County Police Department Records unit. The police report, number 16-L1265, noted the following:

a. A complainant called saying an intoxicated male was knocking and trying to enter the complainant's home. When police arrived, they identified a male on the porch who appeared intoxicated. The man was arrested and searched, which revealed

a U.S. Virgin Island's driver's license in the name of "John Michael Goodson," and credit cards in the name of "Ken Ratliff."

b. The officer knew Ken Ratliff and contacted Ken, who claimed he was a friend of John Goodson. Booking deputies identified the person's real identity as RATLIFF, and a follow up investigation by the investigating officer revealed the U.S. Virgin Island's driver's license did not match the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators ID check guide for the year it claimed to be issued.

c. The officer noted phone conversations between RATLIFF and Kenneth while RATLIFF was in jail, at which time RATLIFF and Kenneth referenced each other as brothers, but RATLIFF told Kenneth to refer to him as John Goodson and say they were business partners.

18. The Utah Identification Bureau files also noted RATLIFF was previously arrested in 2002 for aggravated assault and driving under the influence with a plea of no contest. After the plea of no contest, RATLIFF failed to appear for a sentencing in April 2003 and a warrant was issued for his arrest. There were additional misdemeanor convictions in 1996 for narcotics possession and in 1998 for driving under the influence of alcohol/drugs.

19. The Utah Identification Bureau files also contained an arrest record from 2010 connected to the same fingerprints of RATLIFF, but using a different name. The record indicated the Subject used the name "John Michael Goodson", and he was arrested for hit and run, driving under the influence, criminal

mischief, assault on a police officer, and obstruction of justice. The adjudication was unknown in the document I reviewed. "John Goodsen" is the name provided on the Passport Application as the Emergency Contact.

20. As part of the passport application, RATLIFF also listed a Social Security Number on the application form. The Social Security Administration confirmed the number provided was a valid Social Security Number, however the number was not assigned to an individual named "Michael John Johannes." A search of commercial databases revealed the Social Security Number was also not connected to RATLIFF.

21. On May 23, 2024, I called Yvonne Ratliff. Yvonne Ratliff answered the phone and confirmed that she was indeed Yvonne Ratliff. Yvonne Ratliff then stated that she would hand the phone to Kenneth Ratliff. A person who identified himself as Kenneth Ratliff then began speaking and stated he and Johannes shared the same mother, but further stated Johannes was born in an overseas U.S. territory. Kenneth Ratliff stated he had known Johannes his entire life. Kenneth Ratliff stated he did not know what schools Johannes had attended. Kenneth Ratliff stated he lived together with Johannes for approximately one year in California. Kenneth Ratliff stated he did not know where Johannes was currently living, nor did he know Johannes' phone number.

C. RATLIFF Runs from Special Agent Who Attempted Interview

22. On September 11, 2024, DSS Special Agent ("SA") Mark Thornton visited the address RATLIFF listed on his passport application for Yvonne Ratliff. The address was in Tooele, Utah.

23. SA Thornton knocked on the door, and after about 25 seconds, a man opened the door. SA Thornton asked the man if he was Kenneth, and the man stated that he wasn't and started to move backwards. SA Thornton then asked if the man was "Michael," which was the first name listed on the application in the name of "Michael John Johannes," and the man stated that he was Michael. SA Thornton recognized Michael as the same person depicted in the passport photograph that was included in Michael John Johannes's passport application. At that time, SA Thornton did not know the man's true identity as RATLIFF so he addressed him as Michael.

24. SA Thornton introduced himself, presented his government issued credentials, and asked RATLIFF to come out on the porch and answer some questions about his passport application. SA Thornton showed RATLIFF the application in the name of "Michael John Johannes" and asked if it was his application. RATLIFF stated that he did not want to answer any questions because it would just be used against him. SA Thornton showed him his passport picture that was submitted on the passport application and asked if it was him, but RATLIFF wouldn't answer. RATLIFF said he would not answer any questions

because it would be detrimental to the safety of the nation. RATLIFF stated that the highest levels of the U.S. government and the European Union were working on clarifying his situation. RATLIFF stated that anything further could hurt the safety and security of the nation. SA Thornton informed RATLIFF that he had a security clearance so RATLIFF could answer. RATLIFF stated that he had no way of checking the clearance at that time. RATLIFF stated that SA Thornton should reach out to his chain of command as it pertains to RATLIFF and his situation. RATLIFF stated that his story wasn't being portrayed accurately. SA Thornton advised RATLIFF that he was there to get his side of the story, and that this was RATLIFF's chance to tell it. SA Thornton asked RATLIFF to get the contact information for RATLIFF's supervisor, and that SA Thornton would reach out to them to start figuring out his story. RATLIFF went into the house to get the information. At that point, SA Thornton returned to his government issued vehicle and called 911 to request local Tooele Police Department's assistance. While waiting for an officer to arrive, SA Thornton saw RATLIFF running away from residence and heading East towards the backyard and a fence line. SA Thornton did not check the back yard until a Tooele Police Department Officer arrived, at which time RATLIFF was not located in the back yard.

25. SA Thornton approached the house again with a Tooele Police Department Officer, and an individual identifying himself as Kenneth Ratliff answered the door and provided a driver's license as proof of identity. Kenneth Ratliff stated "Michael"

had left. Kenneth Ratliff provided a phone number for "Michael" as a number with a Utah area code ending in 2037.

D. Additional Research Shows JOHANNES May Have Worked for a Bank Ordered to Cease and Desist Operating Without Authorization

26. While investigating "Michael John Johannes," I found a California Cease and Desist Order from December 6, 2023, ordering Light Bank and Trust to cease and desist from engaging in the business of soliciting or receiving deposits or transacting business in the way or manner of a bank. "Michael Johannes" is listed as the principal of the entity. According to the order, on or about October 11, 2023, a California consumer visited the Light Bank and Trust website and made an online inquiry about loan options. The next day, a person identifying himself as "Mike Johannes from Light Bank" called the consumer from a phone number with a Utah area code ending in 2037 (and the same number Kenneth Ratliff provided SA Thornton for "Michael") and left a voicemail message stating that he was calling to discussed the consumer's inquiry about interest rates for various loans. He further stated that the interest rate would vary depending on the type of loan and invited the consumer to call him back to discuss the loan and request a digital application.

27. The phone number in the California Cease and Desist Order matched the phone number provided by Kenneth Ratliff as belonging to Michael John Johannes.

V. CONCLUSION

28. For all of the reasons described above, there is probable cause to believe that RATLIFF has committed a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1542 (False Statement in Application for a Passport).

Attested to by the applicant in accordance with the requirements of Fed. R. Crim. P. 4.1 by telephone on this 18th day of March 2025.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SP', is written above a horizontal line.

HON. SHERI PYM
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE